

EXHIBIT J

De Blasio Proposes Changes to New York's Elite High Schools

By Elizabeth A. Harris

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In the face of growing pressure to tackle New York City's widespread school segregation, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on Saturday a proposal that would change how students are admitted to eight of the city's specialized high schools, a group of highly sought-after institutions where students gain entry based on a single test.

Black and Hispanic students, who make up 67 percent of the public school population, are grossly underrepresented at the specialized high schools, which include Stuyvesant High School and the Bronx High School of Science.

Mr. de Blasio campaigned on the issue when he first ran for mayor in 2013, saying the specialized schools should “reflect the city better,” but he has yet to make a dent in the problem. This year, black and Latino students received just 10 percent of the offered seats at specialized high schools, a percentage that has held essentially flat for years.

“The Specialized High School Admissions Test isn’t just flawed — it’s a roadblock to justice, progress and academic excellence,” Mr. de Blasio wrote in an op-ed published Saturday on the education website Chalkbeat.

“Can anyone defend this?” he continued. “Can anyone look the parent of a Latino or black child in the eye and tell them their precious daughter or son has an equal chance to get into one of their city’s best high schools? Can anyone say this is the America we signed up for?”



An entrance to Stuyvesant High School, one of New York's specialized high schools. Emily Berl for The New York Times

The most significant change Mr. de Blasio proposed was replacing the test, called the SHSAT, with a new method that would admit students based on their class rank at their middle school and their scores on statewide standardized tests. That change would require approval from the State Legislature, which has shown little appetite for such a move. A bill outlining those changes was introduced in the Assembly on Friday.

Mr. de Blasio announced another, smaller change on Saturday, one the city can do on its own. Beginning in the fall of 2019, the city would set aside 20 percent of seats in each specialized school for low-income students who score just below the cutoff; those students would be able to earn their spot by attending a summer session called the Discovery program. Five percent of seats for this year's ninth graders were awarded this way, the city said.

A spokesman for the city's Education Department said the way students were chosen for the Discovery program would also change. Currently, poor students with certain scores from all over the city qualify, but under the new plan, the city would target students from high-poverty schools instead. Those schools tend to have a higher proportion of black or Hispanic students.

Mr. de Blasio said that if both reforms were enacted, 45 percent of students at the eight specialized schools would be black or Latino.

The Discovery program on its own will have a much more modest impact. The city estimated that the percentage of black and Latino students receiving offers would increase to about 16 percent from 9 percent.

Certain alumni from the specialized schools have staunchly opposed making changes to the admissions test, which they see as a meritocratic standard. Larry Cary, president of the Brooklyn Tech Alumni Foundation board, said in a statement that his group supported the changes to the Discovery program, but not to the test itself. “We firmly oppose the amended bill that completely eliminates the test and substitutes unnamed subjective criteria,” he said. The bill, he continued, “was introduced a mere two hours before Friday midnight, and which is to be voted on this Wednesday, without a hearing. That is no way to make policy.”

Some education advocates who are pushing for admissions changes are unlikely to consider Mr. de Blasio’s proposal to be exhaustive. A 1971 state law says a single test must be used for admissions at Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Technical High School, but many legal experts have said the city could reclassify the other five schools, allowing them to change how students are admitted. Mr. de Blasio has long held that the city cannot make such changes on its own, though he recently said he would “revisit” the issue.